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Susann Baller

Editorial:

The other game: the politics of football in Africa¹

The FIFA World Cup 2006 in Germany is over. Preparations for 2010 in South Africa are already underway. Hosting the World Cup in Germany, however, has reminded us that football is never just one match of 90 or 120 minutes but always comprises many matches that are played, performed and celebrated on, around and beyond the football pitch. During the World Cup, the cultural, social and political dimensions of football have become more than obvious. They entered into our daily routines and living rooms through manifold experiences and impressions, and through a flood of images, stories and rumours. We possibly all remember Chancellor Angela Merkel hugging the 'Kaiser', Franz Beckenbauer; goalkeeper Jens Lehmann holding two of four penalties at the end of the quarter final (perhaps, thanks to the ominous note which he had pulled out of his sock seconds before?); or the two goals of the Italian team during the last minutes of the semi-final which opened the way for the Squadra Azzurra to their fourth World Cup title. Many of us were probably at one time or another invited to a barbecue or a public viewing, got stuck in traffic caused by joyful fans, or wondered about the strained silence during a match prior to a goal by the German team.

All these little scenes are fragments of stories which point beyond the touchlines of the pitch; beyond offside, kick-offs, free kicks, penalty spots or extra time. In football there always exists another game. The match consists of more than the players' tactical skills, the coach's training methods or the final

1 I would like to thank in particular Andreas Mehler, Dirk Kohnert, Martin Doeverspeck, Roman Loimeier and all anonymous reviewers for their commitment, encouragement, and suggestions which largely contributed to the realization of the present volume. I am grateful to Andreas Eckert, Christine Matzke and Peter Bloom for their helpful comments on this Editorial. The VAD provided me with the opportunity to organize the panel 'Playing fields of knowledge: sports and the re-presentation of history' in Frankfurt a.M. (2006). I am obliged to the DFG for funding my travels to the ASA conferences 2004 and 2005 in New Orleans and Washington DC, and to the Humboldt University 'Frauenförderung' which sponsored my travel to the 'Women, sport, and gender in Africa' workshop in February 2006 in Athens/Ohio. Without the academic contacts which I established at these conferences, this special issue would not have been realized. The title of this issue 'The other game' was inspired by the beautiful film *The Other Final* by Johann Kramer which documents a final in 2002 between the then two last teams of the FIFA world rankings, Bhutan and Montserrat.

results of the match. Around the pitch and beyond, fans, journalists, politicians, sponsors and sports officials cheer on their teams, argue over the course of a match, or try to use the sporting achievements for their own goals. Football inspires the creation of numerous and varying reports, legends, praises, shouts of joy – and elegies. Football matches are explained and represented in many different ways: as an allegory of life and emotions; as a drama of success and decline; as an inexplicable mystery; or as a match which, thanks to all kinds of technical facilities, can be completely analyzed in terms of tactics, physical training, numbers of short passes, long passes, headers, zone marking, etc. Whether dusty playing fields, provincial stadiums, or high-tech 'sports domes', football pitches offer arenas not only for the match, but also for the production of public spheres and imaginary spaces where social, cultural and political praxis and discourses are created, celebrated and negotiated. Football is thus played both on the pitch and beyond.

The topic of football has, of course, also drawn the attention of academic research. Apart from the interest British cultural studies and sociology have shown in sports since the 1970s, literature on football has increased steadily since the early 1990s, largely related to research on leisure and the politics of everyday life (Eisenberg 2002, 2006: 4). The World Cup earlier this year has offered a further opportunity for studies of the game. Not only specialised journals, such as *Soccer and Society* which released a special issue on 'Fringe nations in world soccer' (2006, (7) 2-3), but also other, more broad-ranging academic journals have turned towards football. *Historical Social Research* and *Histoire et sociétés: revue européenne d'histoire sociale*, for example, edited special issues on football and its worldwide history (Eisenberg/Lanfranchi 2006, Fontaine et al. 2006). They have compiled important contributions for the understanding of the game, its politics and history. Yet Africa is not very much considered in these issues.²

The history of football in Africa, however, is almost as long as in its mother country England where associational football (soccer) was developed during the first half of the 19th century and formalized in 1863 in London (Eisenberg 1997: 8-9, 2004: 12-34). The first reported match in Africa was probably played on 23 August 1862 between soldiers and employees of the colonial administration in Cape Town (Alegi 2004: 15). Laura Fair dates the first football teams in Zanzibar back to the 1870s when both the British-based Eastern Telegraph Company and the Universities' Mission to Central Africa formed teams (Fair 2001: 228-31). Initially, the game was played and spread in Africa by colonial administrators, soldiers, missionaries, traders and itinerant

2 Two articles in *Soccer and Society* deal with football in Africa (or rather Senegal), and African football players (Poli 2006, Ralph 2006). One contribution in *Historical Social Research* mentions Zaire (Dietschy 2006).

workers. Some of them integrated Africans into their teams. Others founded teams for Africans, or Africans observed Europeans or Indians playing football and, as a result, created their own teams. Although in several colonies, such as the Belgian and the French Congo, there are no sources on football that go back much further than shortly before World War I, football was already widespread in almost all African urban centres by the 1920s and 1930s (Alegi 2002, Eckert 2005, Fair 1997, 2001, Martin 1991, 1995, Stuart 1995, Van Peel 2001). This reflects a similar transformation of football in Europe from an elite game to a popular sport during the same period (Eisenberg 1997: 15-18, 2004: 51-53).³

Since then, football has been transformed into probably the most popular sport played all over Africa. The game has served and still serves multiple and divergent aims. Initially institutionalised to train the body of the colonized, inspire discipline and order, and spread the ideals of fair play and team spirit, Africans used the game for their own goals. The match offered the opportunity to represent themselves as 'modern', to gain status and, thus, to question hierarchical orders, or simply to earn money or to have fun. Football provides an arena for the creation of new configurations of modernity and re-invented traditions where colonial and postcolonial cultural and social practices are reflected, negotiated and modified. Football has become a playing field for the performance of popular cultures, of youthfulness, gender and ethnicity, and of conflict and reconciliation. Football creates sites for the transfer, exchange and production of symbols and signs, their appropriation, transformation and manipulation.

Academic research into football in Africa has grown substantially in the past decade. Moreover, scholars researching Africa have shown interest in football at a relatively early stage. Already in 1961 the anthropologist Norman A. Scotch published a brief research note on football and sorcery. Peter Lienhardt and John Iliffe both provide short descriptions of football in East Africa (Iliffe 1979: 392-93, Lienhardt 1968: 16-17). In-depth research, however, was sparse until the 1990s. Some contributions allowed first insights into the social, cultural and political dimensions of football in various African countries (Akpabot 1984, Clignet/Stark 1974, Couzens 1983, Igbinovia 1985). Still, path-breaking research had to wait. More comprehensive studies were finally offered by authors, such as Phyllis Martin (1991, 1995) and Laura Fair (1997, 2001) who contributed to the understanding of football in colonial towns, Paul Darby (2002) who worked on the complex relations between Africa and FIFA, Peter Alegi who published a monograph on the social and political history of football in South Africa, as well as Gary Armstrong and Richard Giulianotti,

3 Great Britain is the only country where football has been a workers' sport since the 1880s (Eisenberg 2004: 23).

who published a first collection of wide-ranging analyses of football in Africa (2004). Recent conferences have encouraged an impetus towards further research.⁴ Bea Vidacs, a specialist on football in Cameroon, presents a survey of the scholarly debate on sports in Africa in this issue. The selected bibliography permits an overview of available references.

This special issue brings together different perspectives on the game from various disciplines and academic backgrounds. It attempts to foster academic interest in football in Africa among scholars in Germany and beyond, to contribute to the ongoing international debate, and to explore new research fields. The papers collected here deal with various socio-political settings from all over Africa. They focus on current events. Some papers also cover historical background, both of the history of football in Africa (Pelak, Poli, Alegi, Beez, research note of Peter Sebald), and of the question why there has been so little research on football in Africa until recently (Vidacs). The articles investigate questions of politics, economics, culture, globalization and gender. The authors consider football in its social, cultural and political complexity and relevance to current debates and concepts in African studies.

The first four contributions deal with key research fields in football studies: politics, science, sorcery, women and migration. Bea Vidacs analyzes Cameroon's World Cup participation in its social and political context and shows how the study of sports can contribute to a further understanding of African cultures and politics. Michael Schatzberg investigates the occult spheres of the game. He explains how different concepts of political causality are used and interact in the political, cultural and social microcosm of football. Cynthia Pelak examines the impact of globalization and democratization processes in South Africa, particularly on changing local gender relations during the 1990s. She explores how women's football in South Africa has contributed to greater gender equality within sports. Raffaele Poli portrays the historical, geographical and cultural dimensions of the migration of African players to Europe. He contextualizes migration patterns in regard to the widespread hope and illusion of success through football, and in relation to commercial networks which have developed since the colonial past.

The authors of the short contributions enter new fields of investigation. Peter Alegi presents the project of a Football Heritage Complex in South Africa that is being planned for the 2010 FIFA World Cup. He describes this project in relation to other South African museums and the challenging question of the production and representation of historical knowledge. Jigal Beez

4 At the ASA conferences in 2003, 2004, and 2005, several panels and papers on sports and football in Africa were presented. The University of Ohio at Athens organizes annually workshops on sports in Africa. It publishes the free online-journal *Impumulelu*. In South Africa, Achille Mbembe started a series of workshops on football in Africa at the University of Witwatersrand in 2005.

provides insights into a research field which has not been explored much until now. He analyses East African football cartoons and comics as popular expressions that comment upon social, cultural and political processes. Bechie Paul N'guessan examines the mobilization of fans and the media campaign associated with the Ivory Coast team in the 2006 African Cup of Nations and World Cup, and asserts that they attempted to use their international success to promote a message of political stabilization and peace at home.

The dreams and desires related to football in Africa have become part of the everyday life experience all over the continent. They have been portrayed by African artists in numerous novels and movies; among others Fatou Diome's novel *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique* (*The Belly of the Atlantic*, a bestseller in France in 2003), the Guinean film *Ballon d'Or* (*The Golden Ball*, dir. Cheik Doukouré, 1994), the film *Fintar O Destino* (*Dribbling Fate*, dir. Fernando Vendrell, 1998, Cape Verde), and the Cameroonian film *Mr. Foot* (dir. Jean-Marie Têno, 1991). The articles in this issue accompany us to a further journey to African football pitches, stadiums and beyond. They examine the football match and its offshoots. They consider both the game and what we might call the other game. The FIFA World Cup 2010 in South Africa is steadily approaching. It is thus a propitious moment to take a closer look at the complex social, cultural and political dimensions of football in Africa.

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